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ABSTRACT

During the 1985-86 school year, a district's implementation of a newly-adopted social studies curriculum for the grades from kindergarten through high school was studied using 50 Stages of Concern questionnaires and 23 Levels of Use interviews drawn from the Concerns-Based Adoption Model (CBAM). The study results suggested that (1) although citing lack of time and materials as a problem of the curriculum, teachers at all levels met the challenge in highly varied ways; (2) teachers uninvolved in developing the curriculum found educationally sound methods for coping, including creative nonuse; (3) despite considerable participation by social studies teachers in development of the curriculum, many respondents felt that opportunities for teacher input were insufficient; and (4) a wealth of relevant, teacher-created material designed to complement the curriculum remains unavailable outside the individual teachers' own classrooms. This paper briefly reviews the literature on implementation of innovations by teachers; describes CBAM, the assumptions on which it is based, and the elements of its Stages of Concern and Levels of Use components; defines creative nonuse and provides examples from the study; and advises districts to involve teachers closely in curriculum changes. (PGD)

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CLASSROOM REALITIES AND CREATIVE NONUSE

by

Patricia Chamberlin Clark, Ed.D.

presented at the 65th annual meeting of the
California Educational Research Association
November 13 & 14, 1986
Marina del Rey, California

"Teachers have learned to teach by teaching. They have learned techniques, sensitivities, and insights from many trials and many more errors . . . surviving the onslaught of this year's mandate is probably more prevalent than being excited about a new skill."

--Lieberman and Miller (1984),
"Teachers, Their World, and
Their Work"

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Abstract

This paper results from a Concerns-Based Adoption Model study of the actual implementation of a new K-12 Social Studies curriculum during its first year of implementation. Fifty Stages of Concern questionnaires and 23 Levels of Use interviews provide a cross-section of the patterns of concern and actual classroom use of the curriculum between September and February.

The study details problems encountered and creative solutions utilized by teachers in the critical first stages of the new program's implementation. Narrative sections discuss the realities of the classroom, and provide examples of creative nonuse as a form of implementation.

"Creative nonuse" is the term coined for a phenomenon familiar to nearly all teachers: the instructional flex necessitated by a curriculum which leaves the teacher with insufficient time or materials provided for optimum implementation.

Introduction

During the school year of 1985-86, an implementation study of a newly adopted K-12 Social Studies Curriculum was performed, using the Stages of Concern and Levels of Use components of the Concerns-Based Adoption Model. The results of 50 Stages of Concern questionnaires and 23 Levels of Use interviews provide a cross-section of the patterns of concern and actual classroom use of the curriculum between September and February of that first year.

The study resulted in three findings of interest in this paper:

1. Although lack of time and lack of materials were almost universally cited as problems inherent in the new curriculum, teachers at all levels were meeting the challenge in highly varied ways.

2. Teachers who did not participate in construction of the new curriculum were finding educationally sound methods for coping, including creative nonuse.

3. Although a social studies classroom teacher was appointed coordinator at the administrative level of the district, and 60 or more teachers actually participated in planning the new curriculum, there was still a strong sentiment expressed in questionnaires and interviews that insufficient time and opportunity were provided for input from classroom teachers.

In other words, some of the curriculum and materials so carefully designed and selected during almost 20 months of meetings and conferences were found by teachers to be, in one way or another, difficult to utilize or unlikely to succeed in the real classroom world.

Given the findings of this study, it is clear that many teachers in the district have added their own experience and expertise to make the new curriculum viable for their own students in their own classrooms. The teachers interviewed at all levels have created their own materials for various educationally sound reasons, ranging from reading level to relevancy of a prescribed text in a given classroom situation.

The study clearly indicated a wealth of teacher-created materials throughout the district. Both this study and personal knowledge, however, indicate that this expertise has remained in individual classrooms, and is unmentioned in the curriculum guide as well as in the materials catalog.

Implementation and Individual Teachers

Many teachers' walls are decorated with posters carrying the message, "growth is the evidence of life." Perhaps teachers are attracted by the maxim because, more often than not, a prime reason for adopting their profession is that they are interested in the mechanisms of gaining and sharing knowledge. Adoption and trial of an innovation can fill some significant gaps in a teacher's professional life. The intellectual challenge of a new approach, theory, or method can be a stimulating exercise; the longer a teacher stays with her profession, the more likely her outlook is to stagnate, as few teachers work daily with a body of knowledge on their own intellectual level. As more and more work is done in the study of the learning process, new information is accruing continually. Teachers need to keep up with this expanding body of knowledge.

Nevertheless, teachers often are reluctant to try an innovation, or even a major change of instruction, in their classrooms. According to Esposito (1981), "Teachers who are practical deal with problems immediately at hand (maintaining order, stressing achievement) and use concrete solutions (discipline, grading) which seem most expedient and possible within the existing structures of the school" (p. 29).

Lieberman and Miller (1978), explain teachers' reluctance to adopt an innovation wholeheartedly, by delineating teachers' perceptions of practicality and idealism. "Being practical is the opposite of being theoretical, and it is the opposite of being idealistic. Being theoretical is a mode of being that is associated with university courses and with university professors. . . ." (p. 59). They describe a practical idea as one that "considers the circumstances of the school and that . . . can work immediately in a classroom," and conclude that "striving to change the system is idealistic; striving to 'make do' is practical. . . . Being open to change and to outsiders is idealistic; being self-sufficient is practical" (p. 60).

This dichotomy between the ideal and the practical must be considered and dealt with by a district concerned with the optimum implementation of an innovation. Research indicates that many teachers see themselves as coping with day-to-day classroom activities, lacking the time or energy for innovation. As Esposito (1981) states, "Deprived of collegial or even substantial supervisory support, both new and experienced teachers are forced to 'cope' by drawing on personal resources to develop techniques that work for them" (p. 32). Any attempted change, let alone a real innovation, must be imposed by higher authority, or must fit into either a "teacher-proof" or a drastically empty space in classroom practice. As Lortie (1975) says, "New practices [are] accepted only if they [are] consistent with the teacher's personal style and teaching situation" (p. 77-78).

Concerns-Based Adoption Model

The Concerns-Based Adoption Model (CBAM) was developed at the Research & Development Center for Teacher Education, University of Texas at Austin, by Loucks and Hall. It is an example of a set of instruments designed to determine what is really going on in individual classrooms

and in individual teachers' minds during the implementation stage of an innovation. Utilization of CBAM meets the requirement for successful implementation set forth by McLaughlin (1976) in her work on the Rand Change-Agent Study for "a process of mutual adaptation in which project goals and methods [are] modified to suit the needs and interests of participants and in which participants [change] to meet the requirements" (p. 341).

The Concerns-Based Adoption Model is built on six assumptions growing out of the research done at the University of Texas at Austin:

> 1. In educational institutions, change is a process, not an event. 2. The individual must be the primary target of interventions designed to facilitate change in the classroom. 3. Change is a highly personal experience. 4. The change process is not an undifferentiated continuum. 5. Staff development can best be facilitated for the individual by use of a client-centered diagnostic/prescriptive model. 6. Staff developers or other change facilitators need to work in an adaptive, yet systematic way. (Hall & Loucks, 1978, pp. 37-39)

This concept of developmental growth in feelings and skills was codified into the first two components of the Concerns-Based Adoption Model: Stages of Concern and Levels of Use.

In their ensuing research, Hall and Loucks arrived at a reliable and valid questionnaire for measuring stages of concern. The Stages of Concern questionnaire can be used to produce a profile of teacher concerns regarding an innovation which they are in the process of implementing.

Further study of the implementation process resulted in the discovery that utilization of an innovation follows a similar pattern, which can be similarly studied and codified.

> At the same time as the individual's concerns progress, so too does familiarity with and effectiveness in using the innovation. Before actual use, the individual becomes oriented to and increasingly knowledgeable about the innovation. First use is typically disjointed, with management problems quite common. With continued use management becomes routine and the teacher is able to spend more effort providing more effective instruction for the learners and in integrating what she/he is doing with what other teachers are doing. (Loucks & Hall, 1977, p. 19)

The Levels of Use interview is the second component of the Concerns-Based Adoption Model. Based on the same four assumptions as the Stages of Concern questionnaire, it focuses on the behaviors of teachers as they implement an innovation. Eight Levels of Use were found to more or less coincide with the Stages of Concern, and to follow the same basic pattern from Orientation to Renewal. This component describes what the teacher is actually doing with the innovation, while the Stages of Concern questionnaire emphasizes how the teacher feels about it.

Although the two instruments follow similar overall patterns, Loucks and Hall (1977) emphasize that they do not necessarily coincide in a single case at a particular time. Rather, they are commonly quite independent, with even slightly significant correlation only at the highest and lowest levels and stages.

Hall and Loucks (1978) summarize five key principles suggested by their research work with the Stages of Concern component, which can be applied as well to work on Levels of Use. These principles should be considered by any change agent involved in implementation of an innovation. They also form some guidelines for administrators planning and designing staff development interventions in relation to a specific innovation.

> 1) Be sure to attend to the teachers' concerns as well as to the innovation's technology. . . . Too often change facilitators and teacher educators become all-involved in the technology of the innovation and neglect to attend to the persons that are involved.
>
> 2) It is all right to have personal concerns. . . . It is the responsibility of the change facilitators to attend to these early concerns, or the individual is not apt to be able to resolve these and move on to impact concerns.
>
> 3) Do not expect change to be accomplished overnight. . . . Managers of the change process and other designers of staff development activities need to acknowledge and anticipate that change is a process and, in response, they need to adjust their training activities accordingly. . . . Policy and decision makers must . . . stop assuming that their decrees and mandates will result in instantaneous cures out in the field.
>
> 4) Teachers' concerns may not be the same as those of the staff developers. . . . Staff developers need to design and deliver their activities so that the concerns of the teachers are addressed, not their own concerns. Resolution of early concerns will allow teachers to develop the Impact concerns that most interest staff developers.
>
> 5) Within any group there is a variety of concerns. . . . the traditional, cost-effective format of providing common staff development activities for all teachers is no longer acceptable. The problem becomes how to individualize and personalize staff development in such a way that each teacher's concerns are spoken to. . . . (pp. 52-53)

Hall and Loucks (1978) point out that these principles, if addressed, call for creative, unique approaches to assist teachers as they implement a program innovation, and offer the Stages of Concern and Levels of Use models as "one tool for use in achieving our common goal--effective education" (p. 53).

What Is Creative Nonuse?

"Creative nonuse" is the term coined for a phenomenon familiar to nearly all teachers: the instructional flex necessitated by a curriculum which leaves the teacher with insufficient time or inappropriate materials provided for optimum implementation.

Creative nonuse begins when a school district presents its teachers with a shiny new document listing all the things the curriculum planning committee would like to see happen in its classrooms, along with all the books and materials, both new and old, which are to be used as directed. The process continues to build when each teacher attempts to match the curriculum guide and materials with the overall school schedule, the insertions mandated at the local level, and the aptitudes and interests of her own students. At its best, creative nonuse becomes a teacher's reply to a challenge. As Lieberman and Miller (1984) put it, "It is teachers themselves who are the real innovators" (p. 84).

Specific Examples

1. A primary grade teacher at Eielson Air Force Base, 27 miles outside of Fairbanks, created a booklet on the community of North Pole, a community 12 miles closer to the base. Mandated to include the Fairbanks area in the study of communities, she felt that since she had to provide her own materials anyway, and since the city of North Pole is part of the Borough, the students would benefit from a thorough study of the closer city, comparing it to the larger Fairbanks community.

2. A 7th-grade teacher was faced with the assignment of teaching a newly created "Introduction to Social Studies" class, which includes units on anthropology, geography, economics, history, political science, future studies, psychology, and sociology. In the curriculum guide, concept lists for each of these areas are itemized. At the bottom of each list is the notation that, in each concept starred, "Alaska Studies will be incorporated."

Faced with this mandate, the teacher used her own creativity and experience as a longtime Alaskan to produce a game of Alaska Trivia. Students created questions and found answers relevant to Alaska for each discipline listed above. They then created the game board and supplies, and marketed the finished product. This approach enabled the students to cover each of the mandated concepts, and further to comply with the district's command that "Thinking and study skills will be emphasized."

3. A high school American Government teacher felt that the book provided for her classes was neither consistent with the curriculum nor relevant to current civic issues. Her approach was to create a resource notebook from current newspapers and magazines, and to use speakers and out-of-class assignments to focus on state and local issues as well as on government in the real world. Speakers included the governor of Alaska, the chief justice of the Alaska Supreme Court, local legislators, candidates for office, and law enforcement personnel. Outside of class, students were required to attend a city council or borough assembly meeting, attend a trial, and make a notebook of

newspaper items. In class, they spent some time watching in-depth news analyses, C-SPAN, and other available films on current issues.

Gross (1979) itemized five conditions which must be present if implementation is to have a chance to succeed. Key elements needed by teachers include a clear understanding of the proposed innovation and ample opportunity to develop necessary skills and capabilities, as well as access to materials and equipment as required by the innovation. The capacity and willingness to adapt the organizational structure is vital, since many schools discard dreams of an improved program because they have a natural reluctance to break loose from "the way we've always done it." This requirement is closely linked with the last one cited by Gross: the necessity of positive motivation for change on the part of the school staff, from principal to custodian. Optimum implementation needs positive attitudes, cooperation, horizontal and vertical support, and a willingness to take risks and make a few mistakes at the start.

In summary, then, the attitude of the individual teacher in relation to the innovation must not be overlooked if implementation is to be successful. If an individual is going to buy into the innovation wholeheartedly, certain conditions must be present: a need for change must be perceived; participation in planning must be encouraged; time and logistic assistance must be available for staff development interventions; both practical and moral support must be provided at upper administration levels; and willingness to look at such constants as staffing patterns, daily schedules, and educational philosophies must be shown by everybody involved in planning, adoption, and implementation.

A district which really desires institutionalization of its curriculum behind classroom doors must find nonthreatening ways to involve each teacher in the implementation and refinement processes. A district administration needs tools for gathering information on how the innovation is being used, as well as on the attitudes and concerns of the teachers toward the innovation itself, before it can evaluate real student impact. Knowledge of these two elements--actual use and teacher concern--must be in place before any meaningful evaluation can be done. The Concerns-Based Adoption Model is designed to provide this knowledge.

It has been said that a camel is a horse created by a committee. Then it is the teacher's job to make that curriculum-camel into a champion steeplechaser, whether she has to cut off the humps, invent a new kind of saddle, or reconstruct the entire course to make success possible. A graphic representation of implementation success would show an intricate pattern of planning, training, examining, assessing, peer conferring, trouble-shooting, risk-taking, and sharing. Cooperation, communication, and experimentation would be integral to the design. For truly successful implementation, a district would have to commit itself to time and funds for ongoing staff development, collegial cooperation, and assessment of the implementation itself before evaluation of the innovation would give a true picture of student impact and teacher success.

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